

The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

Executive Registry

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11 December 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

SUBJECT: Special National Intelligence Estimate 70-84:  
African Famine: Short-Term Prospects, Problems,  
and Opportunities

1. Attached is a copy of the just completed Special National Intelligence Estimate on African famine. The paper looks at short-term prospects for easing the famine, examines problems and constraints associated with relief efforts, and makes some interesting judgments. Our principal conclusions are that the magnitude of the famine is immense (14-20 million people at risk in the next 6-12 months), that the amount of food committed by donors thus far falls far short of that needed to avoid a large death toll, that delivery of food is seriously hampered by African national logistical and political constraints, and that the famine will continue unless African governments can be influenced to make fundamental changes in their food production and distribution policies. Our estimate also notes that the Soviets will continue to refuse to grant any significant famine assistance--even to its clients. Our estimate on the Ethiopian situation concludes that the famine there is badly exacerbated by policies of the Mengistu regime, which are likely to continue. We also judge that Mengistu is now under sufficient pressure to respond favorably, but with conditions, to Western offers of large-scale aid.

2. I know that you have personally been concerned with the African famine and that under your direction the policy community has addressed specific aspects of this problem constructively and with increased resources--more funds for emergency food, transport and distribution assistance, pressure on African governments for positive changes in agricultural reform, and coordination with fellow donors.

3. The thought strikes me that in response to the present crisis, we could make our generous response even more dramatic--and more effective--by collecting the various parts of that response under an overall new policy initiative. In light of the outpouring of public sympathy for the starving Ethiopians, a gesture of this sort would help continue the wave of patriotism that has formed in just the last few years. And such a gesture would offer the US an opportunity to demonstrate for all peoples the fundamental superiority of free market policies and practices over Soviet-style statist models.

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4. What I am thinking of, and what you may wish to consider, would be an upgrading and reconstitution of the current task force that is working on this problem, appointing a distinguished personality as its head and perhaps giving him temporary Cabinet or sub-Cabinet status, bringing forward our anticipated contributions for African famine (such as a large Supplemental Request of Congress), introducing new elements to help aspects of this problem, such as commitment of US military air transport forces, where appropriate and where welcome, to help with logistics and distribution problems.

5. The several current threads of our policy such as pressing for meaningful reforms from recipient governments, offering new forms and amounts of assistance, and moving quickly could all be brought together under the rubric of a Presidential message and Presidential initiative, with a catchy title and your personal support to rapid, innovative, and massive American response to the problem. We might even invite our allies to join with us in a major, coordinated rescue effort. By sharply raising the profile and the magnitude of US assistance, we would serve also to shine a bright spotlight on the Soviet failure to respond to the problem. And a dramatic response to the present crisis could serve to galvanize our efforts to generally re-orient US foreign assistance programs toward the free-enterprise, development approaches you outlined at Cancun.

  
William J. Casey

Attachment:  
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